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ABSTRACT

In order to better measure outputs in the student personnel services, an attempt was made through an all day off-campus student affairs retreat to develop a model which would identify the desired outcome, indicate the accountable area, specify the method of accomplishing the outcome, and list the techniques for measuring the accomplishments in terms of completion and effectiveness. A short synopsis of the results of the retreat is discussed, as well as the results of several followup sessions. The completed model, however, is not presented in the report. (Author/PC)

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DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERSONNEL OUTCOMES

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DEVELOPING A MODEL

FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERSONNEL OUTCOMES

Introduction

With the age of accountability turning into old age and the retrenchment symbolism changing to a survival cry, the justification for student personnel services must change from predetermined constructs to measured outputs. Thus, in the survival mode, William Rainey Harper College's Student Affairs area has been charged by the Board of Trustees to: "Establish a task force to identify desired outcomes from the Student Affairs area with emphasis on the investigation of measurement techniques, and to recommend a plan for the development of a system to collect data."

To meet this institutional goal the Student Affairs area set as its objective the development of a model which would identify the desired outcome, indicate the accountable area, specify the method of accomplishing the outcome, and listing techniques for measuring the accomplishments in terms of completion and effectiveness.

The purpose, then, of this paper is to describe the process undertaken to reach this objective.

Process

Already operating under the Management By Objectives (MBO) system, the Student Affairs area was part way towards our objective, or at least we thought we were. The first major question raised was What are our desired outcomes? Most student personnel managers went to their stated objectives to answer this question. However, upon analysis of the management objectives, we found that the specification of outcomes was replaced with operational statements presumed needed to reach the desired outcomes, but in many cases not even mentioned.

Thus, it was evident that a separation in thinking must occur. On one hand we needed objectives to manage the operation of programs, staff, and students; but on the other hand we needed outcome objectives to keep the operational objectives on the right course. As a result of this analysis, it was found that most areas really didn't have written statements that defined the desired outcomes of their area.

To help each director define the appropriate outcomes of his or her area and to sensitize each person to the charge of developing a model with specific outcomes written in measurement terms, an all day off-campus Student Affairs retreat was scheduled.

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Retreat

The purpose of the retreat held for all student personnel professionals was to involve each person in the identification of program outcomes, measurement techniques, and to provide input on resolution of identified problem areas. The activities undertaken was the completion of a questionnaire developed from the IRC Model For Input-Output Analysis by James Wattenbarger and John Nickens at the University of Florida. Here each person was asked to respond to predetermined student personnel outcomes and to indicate if they were aware if these were outcomes of Harper's program, if the outcome was carried out, and how effectively it was accomplished.

Following the completion of the questionnaire which contained 46 outcomes, the questionnaires were tallied by the Deans' secretaries while the student personnel staff took part in a group dialogue developing better working relationships between each other. Although scheduled to allow for more open discussion about performance and program appraisal, the group dialogue had an additional benefit of solidifying relationships and understandings of what others did.

The next scheduled activity on the agenda was to look at the questionnaire results. Although summary data was available, time did not allow complete scoring of the results and this item was postponed until a follow-up session could be scheduled.

Next a second questionnaire was administered. The purpose of this questionnaire was to focus on how each participant evaluated the outcomes listed on the questionnaire. The results here indicated that the majority felt confident in evaluating the effectiveness of each outcome. However, the results also showed they did not have valid-reliable data regarding the accomplishments of each outcome, nor the pre-established standards to judge the effectiveness of each outcome. Thus, the objective of the questionnaire was accomplished, i.e., to bring to each person's attention the importance of data collection and the need for pre-established criteria defining the effectiveness of student personnel outcomes.

The last item on the agenda was identification of problem areas in the student personnel programs. The focus here was on the outcome of programs, not the management of programs. The group was divided into four small groups of four or five people. Each person was to write five program areas where desired outcomes were not evident. From each list each person recommended for a master group list the most important problem from his or her viewpoint. When each problem was listed, other group members would ask questions to clarify the exact intent of the problem. When this process was completed, the total group was

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reassembled and each subgroup posted their five or six problem areas. Again clarification was made as to intent. After each of the problems was clarified, the group was asked to rank order the seven most important problems as they viewed them. Each member then turned in their rankings. Because of time constraints, the rankings were not presented at the retreat and were scheduled to be distributed at a follow-up session.

The evaluation of the retreat was generally positive. The major benefit was that many Student Affairs personnel for the first time felt they had input in identifying outcomes and resulting problem areas. The basic recommendation was that follow-up sessions should be conducted and, in addition to working towards the development of an assessment model of student personnel outcomes, the staff recommended the exploration by the total group of activities which could produce the desired outcomes where problems were identified.

Follow-Up Sessions

Several follow-up sessions were scheduled to work further toward the objective of development of an assessment model. The first session scheduled focused on the results of the assessment questionnaire, the identification of problem areas, and suggestions for activities which could hopefully produce desired outcomes. The result of this first session was the identification of six high priority problem areas and the suggestion by the group to set up committees to explore solutions to the identified problems.

The next session scheduled will look at the list of program outcomes completed by each student personnel manager. At this session, scheduled for later this Spring, the Student Affairs staff will review and evaluate each list and then compile a master list of all Student Affairs outcomes for Harper College. This list of outcomes will then become the foundation of the assessment model. The next step in the development process will be to expand the model to include how each outcome will be accomplished, who will coordinate the accomplishment, when it will be accomplished, and the criteria or standard by which the accomplishment will be evaluated. Following the completion of the proposed model, an outside consultant will be asked to validate the outcomes against the institutional goals and mission statement, to validate the performance activities, and to validate the evaluation procedures.

Upon completion of this process the assessment model will be revised and the final document will be produced for use by the Student Affairs area.